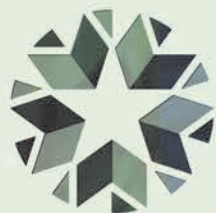


2021

ANNUAL REPORT

Oklahoma Mentoring
Children of Incarcerated
Parents Program



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



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Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report

“Every child is born with great potential. But faced with adversity, the trajectory of life finds a less desirable path. A mentor empowers a child to realize their biggest possible future. To achieve goals once believed out of reach. To ignite their full potential.”
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma

Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) is dedicated to serving and improving the lives of Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) through strategic partnerships, joint planning, and service coordination efforts with stakeholders from across the state. OCCY continues to work toward meaningful engagement with individuals and families with lived CIP experience to better inform and create lasting systemic change. Recent OCCY and partner CIP initiatives and activities include the development of an educational toolkit, a doctoral research fellowship program, professional continuing education, a statewide CIP Advisory Committee, and funding for the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program.

Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program

In accordance with Title 10A 2-10-101 and Title 10A 2-10-102, OCCY is charged to annually issue a request for proposal to establish one-to-one mentoring for children whose parents are incarcerated or youth who are at risk of be-

coming involved in the juvenile justice system. Entities eligible to submit applications to administer the program are limited to non-profit organizations.

OCCY awarded Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma (BBBSOK) \$55,000 to provide one-to-one mentoring to children of incarcerated parents for state fiscal year 2021 (FY2021). The OCCY award allowed BBBSOK to provide (or match) 54 children with a personal adult mentor who was committed to meeting with them on a consistent and regular basis for at least one year. OCCY has supported BBBSOK since state fiscal year 2015. Since that time, BBBSOK has served more than 2,900 matches. A total of 234 matches have been supported by the OCCY funding in the last 6 years. These mentors have changed the trajectory of these children's lives.

The Problem

Oklahoma has one of the highest incarceration rates of any democracy in the *world*,ⁱ affecting thousands of our youth. Many children will be left with caregivers who see them as a burden and are certainly not trained to help a child cope with crisis. More than one in 10 Oklaho-

ma children (11%) have experienced parental incarceration during their childhood. Without positive intervention, many of these children will be incarcerated themselves.ⁱⁱ Last year, 40% of the children in the BBBSOK program had a parent who was currently or previously incarcerated.

OCCY and BBBSOK recognize that while all children are born with equal potential, they do not always have equal opportunity. Too many children, and disproportionately children of color, are struggling with generational poverty, limited academic opportunities, familial incarceration, violence, and a lack of access to successful adults who can serve as role models.

This confluence of risk, at home and in the community, has resulted in poor academic achievement, high drop-out rates, and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system. BBBSOK's strategic and operating plans are rooted in a commitment to serving today's disadvantaged children and youth. BBBSOK has an intentional focus to leverage evidence-based practices (science and data) to bring the best possible resources to children and youth most impacted by adversity.

ⁱPrison Policy Initiative. States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html>
ⁱⁱChildren who had a parent who was ever incarcerated: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9688-children-who-had-a-parent-who-was-ever-incarcerated?loc=38&loc=2#detailed/2/38/false/1648,1603/any/18927,18928>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are categorized into three groups: abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), neglect (emotional and physical), and household challenges (incarcerated parent, mother treated violently, substance abuse or mental illness in the household or parental separation or divorce). Exposure to ACEs can cause prolonged toxic stress, which can lead to a higher risk of learning and behavioral issues, obesity, heart disease, alcoholism, and drug use.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other dysfunction in the home can generate trauma for a child, like food insecurity, parental separation, physical abuse, addiction, and emotional neglect. These ACEs change the architecture of a child's brain, impacting their decision-making, schoolwork, and future health outcomes. ACEs have been linked to risky behaviors, chronic health conditions, low potential, and early death.

The percent of Oklahoma children impacted by ACEs is higher than the national average, with nearly one in five of Oklahoma children under the age of 17 saying “yes” to at least two of the questions below.^{iv} All children in the BBBSOK program, that are supported by OCCY funds, answered ‘yes’ to question 10 ‘Did a household member go to prison’.

Mentoring to Combat the Impact of ACEs

Researchers at Harvard posed the question, “When confronted with the fallout of childhood trauma, why do some children adapt and overcome, while others bear lifelong scars that flatten their potential?” The answers point to mentorship: “Every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.”^v The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention specifically name the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program as a service that counteracts the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences.^{iv}

Take the ACE Test

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often: Swear at you? Insult you? Put you down or humiliate you? Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often: push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever: Touch or fondle you? Have you touch their body in a sexual way? Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
4. Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Did you often or very often feel that your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
5. Did you often or very often feel that: you didn't have enough to eat? Had to wear dirty clothes? Had no one to protect you? Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
7. Was your mother or stepmother often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Sometimes, often, or very often, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Ever repeatedly hit over a minimum of a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill? Did a household member attempt suicide?
10. Did a household member go to prison?

ⁱⁱⁱ American Academy of Pediatrics. Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma. (2014) Retrieved from https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf

^{iv} America's Health Rankings United Health Foundation. Adverse Childhood Experiences. (2021) Retrieved from https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/ACEs_8/state/OK

^v “The Science of Resilience.” Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/03/science-resilience>

^{iv} The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence. (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES.pdf>



Big Brothers Big Sisters Mission

The mission of BBBSOK is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. The goal of Big Brothers Big Sisters has remained the same for over a century: to match one caring, stable, and positive adult role model with one at-risk or high-risk child. Matches are made based on common interests and personalities, child needs, and volunteer abilities. BBBSOK requires at least one year of involvement in the program. BBBSOK offers children one of the greatest protective forces in their development: a nurturing adult who cares enough to build a relationship with them, encouraging trust and resilience.

BBBSOK Match Costs Include

- In-person or video interviews with volunteer, child, and their parent/guardian

- Extensive background checks for volunteers
- Staff salary for client assessments, match profiling, match introduction, and monthly match support conversations

Impact of OCCY Funding on BBBSOK

Funding from OCCY has allowed BBBSOK staff to recruit dedicated volunteer mentors, fully vet potential volunteer mentors to ensure all child safety standards are met, match these mentors with children of incarcerated parents, and provide monthly match support to all parties in the match to ensure Bigs and Littles build strong relationships, and the Littles achieve positive outcomes. BBBSOK professional staff often help Bigs find resources needed to help Littles, overcome questionable behaviors by the parent/guardian, and encourage new activities.

How a Match is Made at BBBSOK



Meet Real Oklahomans

Sam, John and Annie

“ *She wanted Sam to have something that she could not give him on her own — a positive and reliable male role model.* ”

One of BBBSOK’s longest running matches supported by OCCY funding is between Little Brother Sam and his Big Couple, John, and Annie. Sam’s mother, Michelle, enrolled him in the program when his father was serving time in prison. Sam’s father has a history of drug use and was violent toward Sam’s mother, which ultimately led to their divorce. With Michelle being the sole breadwinner in the family, she had to take on several jobs to care for Sam and his younger sister. Michelle is a hard-working and dedicated parent, but like many who take on the role of primary guardian, it can be extremely taxing. She wanted Sam to have something that she could not give him on her own—a positive and reliable male role model.

Unfortunately, like many of the Little Brothers in the program, Sam found himself waiting for a Big Brother for a very long time. The need for adult male mentors is so high in Oklahoma communities, that BBBSOK has over 330 waiting Little Brothers enrolled in its program. Nearly half of those are children have an incarcerated parent. The only thing standing in the way of BBBSOK matching those boys with a mentor is recruiting the qualified volunteers for the job.

Luckily, BBBSOK finally found the right match for Sam and he is one of the fortunate Littles who gained two Bigs as part of a Couples Match. Michelle and BBBSOK staff thought that Sam could benefit from having a male role model in his life, as well as seeing what a strong and healthy relationship and partnership can look like. Sam and his Big Couple have been paired for over a year now. John, Annie, and the BBBSOK program have been a grounding force for Sam. Throughout their match, John and Annie have helped Sam navigate his father’s release from prison and his unstable housing. His Bigs have supported him throughout all Sam’s life changes since their match.



Outcome Data Survey Results for OCCY-Funded Matches

Academic



Say they will work hard at school



Think they'll finish high school*



Say that doing well in school is important to them

Goal Setting



Are able to figure out how to reach their goals*



Set goals and take action to reach them*



Bigs say their Littles have made improvements throughout the match

...

55% of Bigs in OCCY-funded matches say they their Little has made improvements since they started meeting.

Strength of Relationships



Feel close to their Big



Say their relationship with their Big is important to them



Say their big helps them solve problems

Behavior



Avoided school detention for at least three months



Avoided fighting (pushing, shoving, slapping, hitting, or kicking) with other kids for at least a month

...

The timing of these questions pertains to time before taking the survey, or the last three months of school if the survey was taken during summer months.

*Outcomes apply to Littles 11 years or older.

Outcome Data for OCCY-Funded Matches

Through singular moments of positive impact, BBBSOK Littles overcome shyness and self-doubt, build trusting relationships with peers, and improve their academic performance. Instruments developed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America are utilized to

monitor program effectiveness. These instruments include surveys that monitor the strength of a relationship between a Big and Little, measuring outcomes like connectedness, safety, the importance of the match relationship, and the child's feelings about his or her volunteer Big. Other performance outcome measurement tools are administered in a pre-test/post-test format and given at

the initial match introduction and annually at the match anniversary. These evaluation tools work as a direct measurement of academics, relationships, and risky behavior. BBBSOK staff assess the child's positive outcomes through their survey responses.

In addition to these annual evaluation tools, BBBSOK program specialists collect anecdotal data

from the Big, Little, and parent/guardian through regularly scheduled match support conversations (performed monthly for matches that have been together for under a year and quarterly for matches that have been together for over a year). Staff are trained to evaluate and monitor these conversations so that they can assist in ways that lead to the match's longevity.



“ Right now, there are 9 million kids in our country growing up without a mentor. That means that 1 out of every 3 young people do not have the support of a positive caring adult outside of their family. They lack the support many of us relied on. But it is not too late to help us change this statistic.

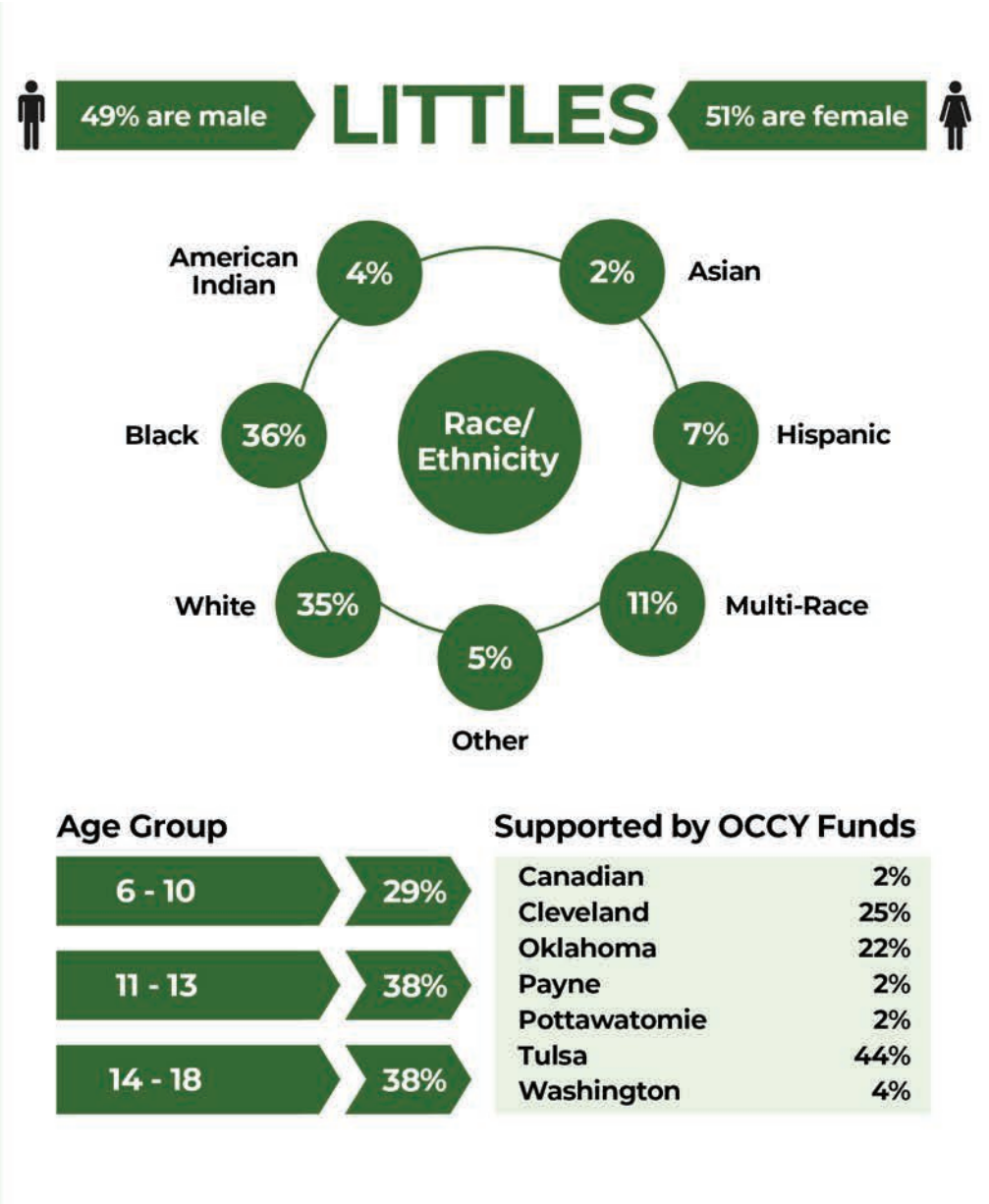
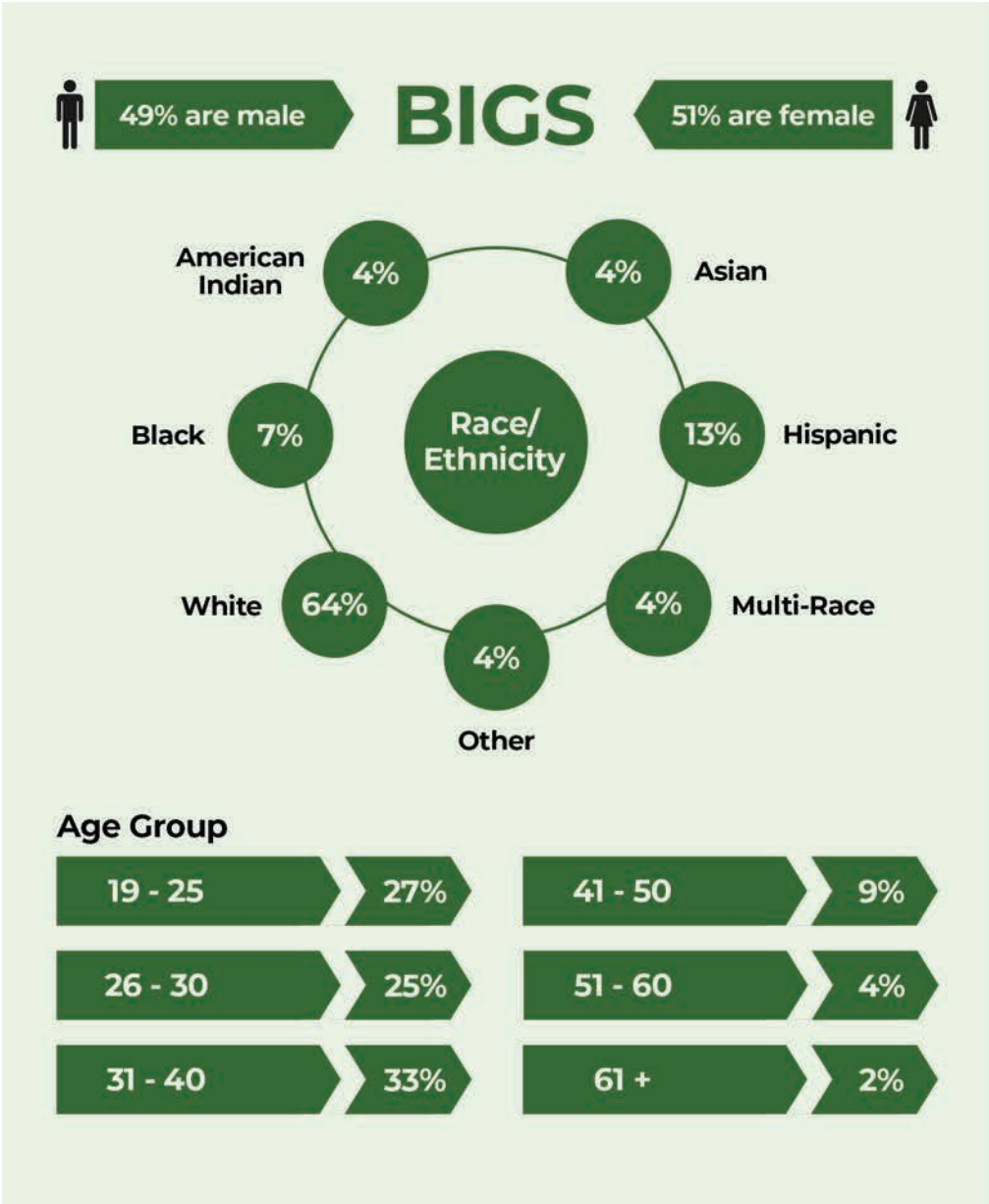
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma

OCCY-Funded BBBSOK Match Lengths

Since 2015, OCCY has funded 234 one-on-one youth mentorships and is still supporting matches from the inaugural OCCY grant in that year. A closed match does not equal a failed match. A match may close because the Little ages out of the BBBSOK program or because the Big moves out of the area. Often these relationships continue in some way that positively impacts the youth.

- The average match length for OCCY funded matches was 19 months.
- 61% of the matches made it beyond their one-year match anniversary.
- 27% of the matches made it to their two-year match anniversary.
- 32% of the closures were due to the volunteer or child moving.
- 3% of the closures were due to the Little aging out of the BBBSOK program.

OCCY-Funded Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma Match Demographics



We Have More Work to Do

“Today, there are over 160 children with incarcerated parents on the BBBSOK waiting list. With Oklahoma’s incarceration rate, more children are constantly joining the list to be matched with their own mentor.”
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma

With funding from OCCY, BBBSOK has made a positive impact on hundreds of lives in Oklahoma, but the work is far from over. Today, there are more than 160 children with incarcerated parents on the BBBSOK waiting list. With Oklahoma’s incarceration rate, more children are constantly joining the list to be matched with their own mentor. BBBSOK would be able to match every one of those children today if it were not for two major obstacles — funding and volunteers.

The Journey Ahead

OCCY is driven to support mentoring programs throughout the state by facilitating innovative public and private partnerships. Within the agency’s Children of Incarcerated Parents program, future efforts include the expansion of its doctoral student research program, fatherhood initiatives to address inter-generational incarceration, the development of a statewide mentoring training program and emphasizing the inclusion of parent voice (and those with lived experiences) within statewide policy and program development. A path to success also includes increased funding to the Oklahoma Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents Program.

We’re Here to Help



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This publication is issued by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth as authorized by Annette Wisk-Jacobi, Executive Director.
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